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Theme: Rhetorical education and the democratic mission of the school

# The importance of Rhetoric and argumentation to schools in England

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Rhetoric fell out of favour in education in England in the twentieth century, largely as a result of the split between English Language and English Literature in the late nineteenth century. With the ascendance of Literature as the central civilizing subject of the school curriculum in England by the 1920s, rhetoric diminished in scope and came to refer to literary stylistics or to corrupt political discourse. The present article seeks to restore rhetoric to the curriculum as an overarching and integrating theory for communication. It not only brings argumentation back into the range of meta-genres that are important in spoken and written discourse, but also argues for a multimodal approach. Text, composition, framing and dialogue are discussed, as well as their pedagogical applications. The end of the article addresses what a curriculum might look like that has rhetoric as a key element, and how this move might enhance the democratic nature of the school as well as the capabilities of its students.

Keywords: rhetoric, argument, argumentation, multimodality, dialogue, text, democracy.

## Introduction

It is time for rhetoric to make a more concerted return to the secondary and high school curriculum in England. By "rhetoric" is meant not a version of classical rhetoric, nor the *progymnasmata* that formed the basis of education in the figures and devices of language of the medieval period. Rather, contemporary rhetoric will need to be refashioned for the twenty-first century, not as "the art of persuasion" but as the "arts of discourse."

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To expand further on these three reference points: classical rhetoric, which includes pre-Athenian rhetoric as well as the Greco-Roman tradition, was concerned with public discourse in early democracies. It was functional in that it served the purpose of helping speakers to win arguments in public forums; and its very functionality established an important principle for rhetoric, namely that it served real world engagement and decision-making. Furthermore, Aristotle's version of rhetoric stood in contrast to Platonic philosophizing. Rhetoric was practical, influential and part of the *realpolitik*. The reason that classical rhetoric is not fully appropriate to contemporary schooling is that it operated and was generated within a different temporal and social context. Its very groundedness in everyday life means that it cannot be transposed as a system to a twenty-first century specific context.

Neither are *progymnasmata* the best way to re-introduce rhetoric to the twenty-first century curriculum. Once such exercises were reified into a system by the classical rhetoricians and their medieval European counterparts, it was the logical next step to write manuals of rhetoric based on a fossilization of the rhetorical practices and the admonitions of antiquity. *Progymnasmata* are text-book exercises based on a simple pedagogic model: principle, example, imitation. To explain more fully, the approach was to outline the principle of the rhetorical device; then to provide an example of it; and then to ask the student to imitate that example. Such a rigid, formal and transmission-like pedagogy was bound to become tedious as a practice for students, but also to kill off the dynamic, fit-for-purpose nature of rhetoric itself in its reduction from a live social practice to a set of rules and regulations.

Thirdly, although much of history has used Aristotle's (1982) definition of rhetoric as the "art of persuasion," there are at least two reasons why that definition is too narrow for contemporary purposes: one is that there is more than "persuasion" in everyday discourse; and another is that rhetoric is no longer confined to spoken or even written verbal language. It is the most appropriate theory of communication, along with social semiotics, to inform multimodal approaches to communication: the use of spoken verbal language and written language alongside and in combination with still image, moving image, gesture, physical movement and other modes of communication. Such a multimodal approach to contemporary communication is made more necessary by the advent over the last thirty years of digitization.

Thus, the definition of rhetoric used in this article differs from that of "the investigation, critical understanding, and production of persuasive language" used in the prospectus for this edition of the journal. It does not subscribe to confining rhetoric to persuasive

language; it is not involved merely in investigation and critical understanding, but in communication, interpretation and production; and it takes criticality as given (see Andrews 2015), suggesting that argumentation rather than critical thinking is the longer and more secure tradition on which contemporary rhetoric can be built. Finally, a further difference is that it is not *language* (speech and writing) that is the only mode of communication with which rhetoric is concerned, but all modes of communication.

## The Basis of a New Approach to Rhetoric

In order to re-fashion rhetoric for schooling in the twenty-first century, we need to go back to first principles. Essentially these are simple: who is communicating to whom about what? Why are they doing so, where is the communication taking place, and how are they doing it? We might add to the last question: how best can they do so? To unpack this basic set of questions that help to provide a framework for communication: first, "who" is communicating could be a single person, a group of people, a company, a government or any other communicator or "rhetor." Second, although the "whom" is assumed to be a single or multiple audience, that audience can play a proactive role in the dialogue as well as being on the receiving end of the communication; their role can be equal to or even more dominant than that of the instigator of the communication. Third, the "what" of the communication can be variously defined as subject-matter, or even as the interaction itself (e.g. "I do" or the slipping of a ring on to the finger in a marriage ceremony – see Austin 1976; Searle 1979; Leech 1983). The "why" of communication sets the communicative act within its social context, and in turn, the social context is partly defined by the economic and political dimensions that inform the moment and which inevitably bring issues of inequality and power relations to the table. The "where" of communication is an underestimated aspect of discourse, bringing spatial and geographical framing to bear on the acts of communication. Finally, the two facets of "how" – how is such communication effected, and how could it best be done? – introduce the range of possibilities for communication as well as questions of effectiveness, propriety and impropriety. As will be discussed later in this article, the "how" of communication is the foundation for much of pedagogy and learning in classrooms, but it is the argument of this article that understanding the whole rhetorical framing of the act of communication is necessary to become highly competent as a

communicator and also as a receiver of communication (a listener, a reader, an audience).

Argumentation is a sub-category of rhetoric. It remains a key part of school curricula in England, but is often aligned with "critical thinking" (which I take to be a *movement* derived from an interest in philosophy in the classroom). While upholding the need for education to be critical – particularly at the higher levels within schooling – the best way to embed argumentation and criticality in the curriculum is not within a free-floating pre-university course, but within the different school subjects themselves. This is because argument, like rhetoric, is field-specific as well as field-independent (Toulmin 2003). That is to say, the ways claims are linked to evidence is via warrants that are informed by the "backing" (the values, *mores* and *modi operandi*) of the different subjects – subjects that, in due course, become disciplines at university level. (Perhaps we should say that it is the nineteenth century disciplines that have exerted the strongest influence on the subjects of the school curriculum in England.) The lineaments of argumentation as a field-independent set of guidelines, and the field-specific elements of argumentation in particular subjects/disciplines, make argument and argumentation a sub-category of rhetoric because argument and argumentation are not only about persuasion: they are about clarification, working toward consensus, resolution and/or tolerance of difference, persuasion and rationalization, as well as other functions that ensure the workings of democracy. Because argumentation is one aspect of the arts of discourse, it fits (as it always has done within a narrower definition of rhetoric) within a theory of rhetoric. Rhetoric also allows argumentation to be seen not just as an academic exercise in preparation for the higher orders of thinking at university level, but also as key to the repertoire of communication for a social and working life, for participation in a democracy and for everyday resolution of difference.

The above paragraphs outline some of the principles that need to be taken into account. Added to these principles is consideration of the fact of multimodality in contemporary communication. Multimodality is not new: the juxtaposition of word and image, for example, has been common practice in artwork, in illuminated manuscripts, in book illustrations for hundreds of years, and more recently in newspapers and magazines. Similarly, speech and gesture have always accompanied each other; film is a medium in which moving image, sound and speech (as well as sub-titles in writing) have been working alongside each other since its inception. Multimodality is so ubiquitous in communication as to be taken for granted. Even in seemingly monomodal acts of communication, there is usually more than one mode at play,

both explicitly as well as implicitly: reading a poem on a page, for example, requires attention not only to the words (and possibly the inner voice that is recited in the head), but to their spatial arrangement, their relation to the white space around them, and, furthermore, to the spatial context (on a busy train, in an isolated location) in which the poem is read (Andrews 2018).

Multimodality has been given more prominence in research since the 1990s, coincident with the advent of digitization and the internet/worldwide web (Kress 2010, Hawisher et al. 2010). The contiguity of word and image on computer interfaces, and in the last twenty years or so on mobile phone screens, with enhanced audio facility, has meant that multimodality has become the norm for communication. There is now a helpful distinction between multimodality, which deals with the modes of communication, and media (including "social media") which provide the hardware, applications and platforms via which multimodal messages are carried. The ubiquity and presence of multimodality in our lives can be taken for granted or seem so ever-present as to be banal. Such ubiquity might remain banal if it were not for the case that multimodality, nearly thirty years after its re-birth through digitization, still does not figure prominently enough in educational curricula in schools in England.

## Curriculum and Pedagogic Design

This section will focus initially on curricular and pedagogic design in schools in England, and then look more widely at such design in other European jurisdictions. The advent of digitization, the re-appearance of multimodality and the re-emergence of rhetoric (e.g. Andrews 1992, 2014) in the early 1990s was coincident with the establishment of the National Curriculum in England via the Education Reform Act of 1988. It is important to note that the very title is a misnomer: the curriculum is not "national" in that it did not apply to the UK as a whole, but only to England and Wales. There are even differences in its application between these two jurisdictions, so the following discussion applies to England only.

One of the principles of the National Curriculum in England is that it was built on nineteenth century "subjects." These subjects were conservatively conceived, so that although "English" was split into reading, writing, speaking and listening (traditionally, the "four language skills"), each of these skills, in the order listed above, was given greater prominence than the next one. Reading and becoming literate had greater prominence than writing; speaking had greater

prominence than listening; and speaking and listening (always seen as reciprocal in principle if not in practice) were seen as more reciprocal, and given less curriculum time, than reading and writing (where the reciprocity was under-utilized). The arrival of the "literacy hour" in primary schools in the mid-1990s gave even greater weight to the hierarchy of language skills. At secondary level, the subsequent reinforcement of the distinction between language and literature resulted in literature study being seen as the province of the elite, while "functional language study" became the fodder for the majority. Added to this compartmentalization of the curriculum was the regressive move to privilege "heritage" in the choice of English literature that was available for study: a narrowly conceived heritage. It could be that the birth of English as a school subject in the late 1900s (see Dixon 1991, which gives a provenance to school English as emerging from literary studies) foregrounded a traditional English literature canon at the expense of language and "real world" engagement with language. Inadvertently (and ironically, given Dixon's own commitment to language and social use) rhetoric was side-lined as "English" became the repository of expressiveness, literary appreciation and enculturation.

The fusion of an eclectic (world) range of literature with learning to communicate for the twenty-first century seems a long way from the narrow conception of the language skills and a tightly focussed selection of "national" literature in English. It is also case that the last thirty years in education in England have seen a turn to more transmissive models of pedagogy, so that the heritage is *taught* – and therefore, by assumption, learnt. Particularly in the last ten years, several multi-academy chains of schools (the new norm in school governance replacing local authority control) have adopted monolithic pedagogic models in which "subject knowledge" is taught at the expense of learning processes, and in which examinations have increasingly again become the norm to test such knowledge.

The debate about the place of rhetoric in the school curriculum outside England has been more secure, more general and more grounded in the relationship between language, culture and civic education (see Rutten & Soltaert 2012; Biesta 2012). In some countries in Europe, and in the USA via the Scottish tradition of rhetoric, the place of rhetoric is more assured than in England, where the split between language and literature first appeared in the late nineteenth century. It appears that this fissure in schooling in England gave literature the chance to establish itself as the "central humanities discipline" from the 1920s onwards (see Sampson 1921) and thus not only to secure a literary basis to the curriculum, but also a narrow cultural basis too.

Rhetoric was forgotten, and became the narrowly political pejorative term that is its principal association today in everyday discourse.

It can be seen from the above analysis that a rhetorical perspective would not have associated language and literature so closely with nationhood, nostalgia and elitism (though rhetoric, in a narrower pejorative sense, has been used to reinforce such associations at particular points in history); nor (though the links between rhetoric and assessment are under-researched) would an over-emphasis on examinations have been likely. If rhetoric is understood and practised as the arts of discourse, a range of modes and media would be used to ensure that the school population is "literate" at the end of formal schooling. Such "literacy" would be multimodal and it would engage with fiction and non-fiction, private and public discourse, a range of genres, speech/listening as well as reading/writing, and the relationship between communication and action in real life.

## Composition and Framing

A *concomitur* of a rhetorical approach is that, to put it at its most general, the rhetor *composes*; and the audience or interlocutor *re-composes*. In other words, to explicate the process in more detail, the person (or people) who are instigating the act of communication first draws from the available multimodal resources the specific elements he/she or they need to effect the communication. If the rhetor is an artist, he/she draws on whichever media are needed to make the composition; if they (I will use the generic "they" to refer now to a single or multiple composer) are a musical composer, they will use any or all of the resources available to them to make the piece of music; if a writer, the modes and media that are best suited to the act of communication; and so on. Each of these rhetors are composers: they literally put together elements to make meaning, and frame them within conventional or semi-conventional frames (or indeed transgress and/or break the frames) for making meaning. The compositions created by any such rhetors are always implicitly or explicitly multimodal. These compositions involve the bringing together of parts to create a new whole. The parts may sit in tension with each other, and/or be complementary. One mode may be foregrounded with the others in support; or there may be an equal balance between the modes.

By suggesting that the interlocutor *re-composes*, acknowledgement is being made that communication is not a one-way street. A message is received by the audience; but the audience re-makes meaning according to their own history, their own associations,

their own interpretation of the message that has been "sent." The audience thus plays a pro-active part in meaning-making; they may well, for example, re-compose again in the form of a review, in talk about a performance after a show, or in discussion of a book. Every act of learning in a school seems to consist of a re-making by the student of the opportunity for learning that is offered by the teacher. Again, to concretize this process: a teacher (or a student) may bring into a classroom an "object" for discussion. It could be a fossil from a beach, or an experience from childhood or an observation from a weekend or from the world news. That "object" is explored for its significance, then transformed via rhetorical transduction into another form: an essay, a series of notes, an oral debate, a painting, a report, a photograph with captions. It seems to me that, pedagogically, the act of learning in schools is an act of transduction from one mode to another, and thus a re-making of the knowledge as initially presented to or by the student. If this is the case, it follows that the curriculum and its pedagogies must make room for such composition and re-composition via transduction.

None of this process can be completed and make meaning without the act of framing. Framing (the verb rather than the noun "frames") is in the hands of the rhetor and the audience. If they don't share the same understanding of the frames in which they are communicating, it is likely that clear communication will not take place as intended. Frames are scaffolds for the construction of meaning. They can be put up, dismantled, be made invisible, accentuated, transgressed, broken according to the rhetorical purpose; but they should not be reified to the extent that they become rigid and dominate the communication. At the same time, meaningful communication cannot take place without an act of framing that suggests the genre (or hybrid mix of genres) and the social basis on which communication is taking place.

## Text

The notion of "text" from a rhetorical, multimodal and digital perspective is different from "text" in the narrower sense of a unified work of meaningful language or the even narrower sense in schooling of the "textbook" that contains the key works that are to be studied in the curriculum (see Fransman & Andrews 2012). Texts lie inside the frames that are discussed in the previous section. Multimodally, they are often collages, mash-ups or juxtapositions in the compositions that are created and "read." From a rhetorical perspective, they have real world signification in that they are not cauterized or separated

from the real world. Such texts make distinctions like "fiction" and its opposite, "non-fiction" redundant. We can see that, as suggested elsewhere in this article, the privileging of fiction in a curriculum in England since the 1920s makes fiction centre-stage, and other forms of written discourse marginal ("non-fiction"). From a digital perspective, texts are not the brief SMS derived messages that we use when we cannot get through by phone or when we need to send a brief message (somewhat superseded by Twitter and Whatsapp and other applications that enable rapid, brief and socially networked messaging), but texts in the more general sense are fluid, and repurposeable in different modes, platforms and media.

A key consideration for texts in a twenty-first century curriculum is length. While multimodality and digitization have, in their different as well as combined ways, shortened the length of messages we send to one another, the *communication curriculum* has to decide: does it want to recognize this emphasis on brevity and accept it, or does it wish to preserve the articulated length and scale of texts so that students can learn structure, articulation and argument? Rhetoric helps to answer this question. It requires both an understanding, analysis and use of short texts on the one hand, and longer texts on the other. Short texts will be needed in a range of social and political situations and they can indeed "argue," especially in internet forums where arguments can be built collectively, challenged, and where evidence can be offered and rebuttals made. But the ability to compose and read longer texts is essential to a democracy because structured, complex arguments have to be made, discussed and resolved in order for reasoned action to take place; or, at the very least, for toleration of difference in a democratic society.

## Argumentation

In the section above on a new approach to rhetoric, I re-emphasized the importance of argumentation. In curricular terms, it was heartening to see that during the 1990s the National Curriculum in England developed its awareness of argument. The version implemented from 2000 (now hard to source) acknowledged the importance of argumentation, not just in English as a school subject, but also in the Arts, History, Geography, Science and Mathematics. Essentially, this meant: how are ideas articulated (both expressed and joined) within a subject? What kinds of evidence counts within each subject? Without going down to the level of epistemology ("What is history?") or into the more nuanced aspects of Toulminian model of argumentation (warrant,

backing), the curriculum showed signs that it was keen that, by the end of formal schooling, students should be able to argue for and/or against a proposition and provide evidence to back up their claims. In this sense, the foundation for work, further education and/or university level higher education was established more firmly. Clearly (and now much more explicitly) criteria for the highest performances at university level include explicit reference to argumentational ability; and, in the "real world," argumentation is understood to be a process via which consensus is reached without violence or force (cf. Habermas 1986).

Multimodal argumentation further acknowledges that evidence can take many forms. Although the "language" of argumentation is conventionally verbal (witness statements, data from interviews, supporting references, notes from observation), it can also be visual (a photograph of a scientific effect, a car number plate, footage from a surveillance camera), tactile (a piece of cloth in a court of law, a fingerprint) and/or gestural. In cases where the claim is compressed with the evidence – say, in the case of an artwork or musical composition presented for assessment, without verbal accompaniment – multimodality can help to explain the argumentational rationale.

Such an approach to argumentation within a twenty-first century conception of contemporary rhetoric implies a number of different assumptions about argument: no longer need argument be linear and sequential, thus invoking logic. Connections may be made between claims and evidence that are either compressed into a single statement or dis-aggregated so that the claim and supporting evidence are clearly differentiated. Contiguity remains important, but links may be made by the audience as well as the composer. In effect, the argument is made up of the constituent parts of the composition and their relationship within (and beyond) a frame. Thus, as suggested earlier, the functions of argumentation become more than persuasion and more than is conventionally assumed; they include clarification, the generation of humour; the bringing together of unlikely elements in a composition; the dialogue between rhetor and audience; a series of moves towards consensus or the understanding of difference; and a precursor for decision-making and action.

We know that argument is highly prized in school and university education, but also in the workplace and in society more generally. There is often an assumption that students progress in their schooling from personal and narrative forms of discourse toward more public and argumentational forms. Such an assumption is based on a Piagetian (2001) model of development that we are gradually socialized, and move from individual to collective cognition. From a different perspective,

however, it can be seen that argumentation is present in everyday discourse from the start of life, and certainly by the start of schooling. The dumbing down of argument in early or later schooling (and even at university level) may well militate against its development as a social and cognitive tool, but a broader conception of education and learning will recognise that argument is part of the fabric of growing up in a democracy. Although outside the curriculum itself, the school can create a community that is comfortable with argumentation. A classic example is the creation of a school council, or more informal gatherings in which teachers and students meet to discuss ideas, resolve difference, or build collective consensus to inform action. Formal debates of an academic nature are possible from a much earlier age than has often been assumed, and through these students can learn that the formulation of an argument can be made without necessarily believing in the cause that is argued. Learning to accept challenges to a claim or proposition and to go through a process of rational and thoughtful argument as ideas develop – these processes are highly valuable to an education system and its function in society, justifying ever more strongly why argument is highly prized within assessment criteria and regimes.

## How Can Rhetoric and Argumentation Be Better Embedded within the School Curriculum?

There are some key issues that have to be debated or settled before we can think through how rhetoric and argumentation may be better represented within the school curriculum.

First, it has to be acknowledged that school subjects, themselves derived from university disciplines, are sites for the *contestation* of knowledge and not just the fossilization of knowledge. Second, if we accept that the present curricula in schools in different jurisdictions are not only based on a selection of knowledge, but also that it is hard to reform such curricula, let alone revolutionalize them, we may decide that it is best to work within existing patterns of curriculum design. Third, if we were to consider wholesale revolution in the school curriculum, what would our principles and starting points be for a thoroughly relevant, elegant and pedagogically exciting curriculum? Each one of these facets of the "problem" needs to be taken in turn.

To understand that school subjects are not set in stone, but are sites for contestation of knowledge in a particular epistemological field of enquiry, is to take a considerable leap from much current practice. In one of my own fields of interest – literature – there are a

number of contestable issues. It can be safely argued and agreed that a study of poetry, plays, novels and short stories as fictional works is a worthy area of study. But even "English Literature" (part of the title of my degree at university, and a school subject in England) is not that clear a category. It can mean literature written in England, by those born in England, or by anyone writing in the English language. Often is has hegemonically assumed that a writer like Yeats or Heaney (Irish) or Lochhead (Scottish) is part of English Literature. "Literature in English" can include translations into English, and/or writing in the postcolonial tradition in the English language. Conversely (and inappropriately), writing by Black British or Asian British writers, whether they were born in England or moved to England in their childhood, is often seen in narrow circles as "writing from other cultures." Overall, the confusion and uncertainty about what constitutes "Englishness" from a European, post-Brexit and/or UK-based perspective can provide fuel for debate about "English Literature." We can see, even from this simple example, that notions of nationhood, culture, ethnicity and race inform discussions of school and university-based categories. If you see these four aspects of identity as uniform, you have a narrower and more rigid sense of self than if you see them as related but dis-aggregated. A rhetorical perspective allows an understanding of the contested nature of the field and for celebrations of hybridity, both within society and within literature.

If, in the second of the issues outlined above, you decide to work within existing curricular categories and conventions, you will find that, as discussed earlier in this article that argumentation, if not rhetoric, has appeared as a goal in subjects as diverse as history, geography, mathematics and science. In this approach, there is hope that rhetoric and argumentation might take a more central role in all school subjects, not just at the higher levels, but throughout the curriculum. Argumentation, however, tends to be seen as a higher order cognitive skill deriving from earlier competence in narrative and description. From a Piagetian perspective (one that still has a strong hold on educational curriculum planning), "formal operations" follow the establishment of "concrete operations." In effect, from this perspective, narrative plays a much larger part in discourse for longer, and precedes argumentation. Contrary to this conventional view is the assumption that young children are adept at argumentation; that they understand the social context of discourse; and that they are fully rational beings from an earlier age than the Piagetian position would acknowledge. Whichever position is taken in terms of cognitive development, rhetoric and argumentation can be built into existing curricula by emphasizing the social nature of modes

of communication; the place of argument *alongside* narrative and description; and situating the learning in the range of school subjects within a real-world context, thus opening communication not only to social, but also to socio-political situations.

Thirdly, imagine not so much a reform and development of the curriculum as a wholesale curricular revolution. If we were starting from scratch, what would a rhetoric-informed curriculum look like? In the medieval period, rhetoric was one of the three subjects in the *trivium*, which also included grammar (the mechanics, terms and categorizations of language) and logic (dialectic thought and analysis). Rhetoric was seen as the application of these two in the world of interaction. Added to these in an overall liberal arts curriculum were aspects of number: arithmetic, geometry (numbers in space), music (numbers in time) and astronomy (numbers in space and time). To re-work this curriculum for the twenty-first century, we might suggest a different configuration. Rhetoric would cover all aspects of communication: speech, writing, still image, moving image, gesture, physical movement, sound (including music). It would embrace all functions of communication (not just persuasion) and would take a multimodal perspective. Within each of the modes of communication, the "grammar" of those modes would have to be learnt, but this would be more than the sentence-based linguistic grammar that we have been used to. Even within spoken and written language (which have different grammars), there are levels of scale of unit with language that require description and understanding; these levels (e.g. the phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactic, sub-textual and textual) need not only to be understood, but practice in how to integrate/use them must be included in a working and practicable curriculum. Added to these would be the grammars of visual design (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006); of movement and of gesture. The learning of additional second or foreign languages would come under the aegis of a communication-based curriculum.

While outside the focus of the present article, such a new curriculum would expect also to include Mathematics as a separate form of communication/"language" system, perhaps including elements of the medieval curriculum such as geometry and music (though music would also fall under the rhetoric of sound). It would also include Science – not only the constituent sub-divisions of science, but also "scientific method"; and other subjects that would loosely come under the canopy of Humanities: Geography, History, Civic Education.

Such a re-configured curriculum does not look that different from current curricula, so it may be that gradual moves towards a new curriculum for the twenty-first century might be taken, according to

the needs of each educational jurisdiction, but with a larger aim in mind: the creation of a curriculum to equip young people to play an active and fully empowered part in democratic societies of the future.

## Conclusion

Behind the notion of curriculum reform in the light of rhetorical education and the democratic mission of the school is a further principle: that of dialogism. The idea that learning should be more dialogic (the etymology of the word is Greek, meaning "through speech") stems from a number of sources. One of these is Bakhtin's theory of the dialogic imagination (Bakhtin 1982) which suggests that the products of literature and culture are generated not by a single authorial voice but by dialogue with a tradition of voices, to which a new voice is added. Another is the emergence of "learner voice" ("pupil voice" or "student voice") in the business of education (see Walker & Logan 2008), whether it is represented by presence on school councils, university boards and committees, or in some other way. The inclusion of such voices redresses the imbalance of a teacher-led transmission pedagogy by seeing learning as a collaborative negotiation and construct between teacher and pupil/student. The principle of dialogism is also present in Alexander (2008) where it underpins the generation of productive talk in the classroom or seminar room – a tradition that goes back at least to the rise of oracy (Wilkinson 1965) and to the seminal work of Barnes, Britton and Rosen (1971) on language, the learner and the school. Finally, the dialogic principle sits behind the wider paradigm shift from teaching to learning, best characterized by Lightfoot and Martin (1988).

Rhetorical education, including argumentation, sits in a long European tradition and has also been given momentum by the research, practices and theories mentioned in the present article. It is important not just in itself as a curricular presence, but in the very nature of rhetoric: to be outward looking, to engage with the world, to help forge proactive and balanced citizenship, and to equip young people to make a positive contribution to the future.

Note

1. See the National Curriculum in England: English Programmes of Study (DfE) for the latest version of the English programmes of study within the National Curriculum in England (DfE 2014).

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